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ABSTRACT

The Occupational Learning Center Program is an alternative high school experience for young people who are academically or socially unable to cope with the regular high school program. The curriculum includes development of basic skills, vocational development, personal and vocational counseling, and job placement and follow-up. Each student works at his or her own pace on individual assignments to complete the requirements of the program, which include successful performance on a job. The programs allows students to complete high school and develop career-related skills, thus preparing them for further education or for the world of work. Other documents in this series are CG 008 165 through CG 008 175. (Author)

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CASE STUDIES IN PRACTICAL CAREER GUIDANCE
NUMBER 12

ED 078341

Occupational Learning Center

Syracuse City School District

Syracuse, New York

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TECHNICAL REPORT

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CASE STUDIES IN PRACTICAL CAREER GUIDANCE

NUMBER 12

Occupational Learning Center
Syracuse City School District
Syracuse, New York

Jurgen M. Wolff

American Institutes for Research
in the Behavioral Sciences
Palo Alto, California
June, 1973

The project reported herein was performed pursuant to a contract from the U.S. Office of Education, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. The opinions expressed, however, do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Office of Education, and no official endorsement by the Office of Education should be inferred.

U.S. Department of

HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE

Office of Education

Office of Planning, Budgeting, and Evaluation

This case study is one in a series of thirteen which was produced by the Youth Development Research Program of the American Institutes for Research under contract with the Office of Planning, Budgeting, and Evaluation of the U.S. Office of Education. The purpose of the contract was to examine the practical career guidance, counseling, and placement which is provided to noncollege-bound secondary level students. As part of the effort, programs which are making an illustrative attempt to deal with the needs of noncollege-bound youth were identified and described in case studies. Case studies have been written on the following programs:

1. Baltimore Placement and Follow-up Program
   Baltimore City Public Schools
   Baltimore, Maryland

2. Career Development Center
   Troy High School
   Fullerton, California

3. Career and Educational Planning Program
   Pioneer Senior High School
   San Jose, California

4. Career Guidance Program
   Hood River Valley High School
   Hood River, Oregon

5. Computerized Vocational Information System
   Willowbrook High School
   Villa Park, Illinois

6. Coordinated Vocational and Academic Education
   North Gwinnett High School
   Suwanee, Georgia

7. Developmental Career Guidance Project
   Detroit Public Schools
   Detroit, Michigan

8. Employability Development Team
   Cleveland Public Schools
   Cleveland, Ohio

9. Job Development Program
   Cleveland Public Schools
   Cleveland, Ohio

10. Kimberly Guidance Program
    Kimberly High School
    Kimberly, Idaho

11. Lenawee Vocational-Technical Center and Placement Program
    Adrian, Michigan

12. Occupational Learning Center
    Syracuse City School District
    Syracuse, New York

13. Youth Career Action Program
    San Jose Unified School District
    San Jose, California

Other products of this contract include Practical Career Guidance, Counseling, and Placement for the Noncollege-Bound Student: A Review of the Literature, and the project's final report which is entitled Planning, Structuring, and Evaluating Practical Career Guidance for Integration by Noncollege-Bound Youths. The final report outlines a planning-evaluation model which program personnel may use in developing local career guidance counseling and placement services.

OCCUPATIONAL LEARNING CENTER PROGRAM
SYRACUSE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT
SYRACUSE, NEW YORK

Abstract

The Occupational Learning Center Program is an alternative high school experience for young people who are academically or socially unable to cope with the regular high school program. The curriculum includes development of basic skills, vocational development, personal and vocational counseling, and job placement and follow-up. Each student works at his or her own pace on individual assignments to complete the requirements of the program, which include successful performance on a job. The program allows students to complete high school and develop career-related skills, thus preparing them for further education or for the world of work.

In 1969, the Statler Foundation selected the city of Syracuse as a representative community to examine how the needs of dropouts and potential dropouts could be served through the work-study concept in education. The Syracuse University Research Corporation was funded by the Foundation to make a feasibility study of this entire problem in Syracuse. Their reports, which were published in spring of 1969, recommended an expansion of existing work-study programs in city schools. In the spring of 1970, the Statler Foundation also granted $10,000 to the Syracuse City School District for the implementation of a pilot program designed to develop innovative ways to change the attitudes, behavior, and self-concepts of a few disaffected youth at Central Technical High School. In the summer of 1970, an Occupational Readiness Program, served thirty extremely disadvantaged students, offering them help with basic academic skills and occupational guidance. These were students due to enter high school in the fall. They continued their education and most of them entered the OLC program that began in September 1970.

To add to the findings of the pilot study, the program administrators drew on a variety of information sources in shaping the initial program, including documents of the Educational Resources Information Center; the Job Corps Library; feasibility reports of the Syracuse University Research Corporation; the Learning Foundation's individualized prescription program; the suggestions and support of the U.S. Office of Education and the New York State State Education Department; responses to letters of inquiry to many schools that were attempting innovative programs; and visits to the Guided Occupational Program at Oceanside, New York, the New York State Adult Education Center in Albany, and the Genesee Valley Regional Education Center in Rochester.

As is often the case with exemplary programs, the staff members played a key role in getting the project under way. Among those who have been with the project since its beginning and have contributed to its direction are the Supervisor of the Special Needs and Work-Study Programs for the Syracuse City School District, two interdisciplinary instructors, and a vocational counselor employed by the program.

Project Development

In September 1970, the first Occupational Learning Center opened with a staff of two interdisciplinary teachers and one vocational counselor to

serve thirty-six students. The students were referred to the Center by the principal of Central Technical High School on the basis of greatest need as assessed by guidance personnel. The information used in making a referral is listed on page 14. Dropouts were also encouraged to join the program. The Learning Center was conducted as an Annex Program for Central Technical High School in a business building across the street. In terms of vocational training and extracurricular activities, the students continued to be considered members of their original high school.

Although there has been considerable updating and refinement in the OLC's development, the noticeable change in the program has been its expansion. It has gone from one center to five and from thirty-six students to one hundred and seventy-five. It continues to operate on a combination of mostly local district funds, supplemented by federal vocational education funds and some Model Cities money. Also, the original staff continues to be a major driving force for the project. In terms of how the OLC's relate to students, one change has been that all the OLC's now are removed from the immediate vicinity of the city schools. This was done because the temptation to fraternize with peers in the regular school was too great, and because less stigma is attached to the program when it is seen as an independent entity rather than a step-child of the regular school. The program has become somewhat less job-oriented as it has progressed and as a complete, individualized curriculum has been developed with emphasis on career orientation and training. The staff and administration characterize these, and other minor changes, as evolutionary, and attribute continuing improvements primarily to the dedication of many of the staff and the policy of the administration in allowing the staff to continue to experiment and innovate.

Target Population and Setting

The students at the OLCs are almost all inner-city youths. About 90% are Black, 9% are white, and the remainder have Spanish surnames. Some 70% are males, and about 85% of all OLC students come from families of low socioeconomic status (defined as having annual family incomes of $6,000 or less). In the Syracuse City School District as a whole, 75% of the students are white, 22% are Black, 1% have Spanish surnames, and 1% are native American. Half of the students come from families of middle socioeconomic status ($6,000 to $15,000 annual income), and the remainder are equally divided between high and low socioeconomic status families.

Most of the students in the OLC program do not plan to obtain college educations; more than half will probably take a job after graduating, while one-fifth will enlist in the Armed Forces; about 15% will attend a two-year college program, trade school, or vocational or technical program; and 5% will marry and keep house. About 5% will work on at least a baccalaureate degree compared with 30% doing so in the district as a whole.

The students selected for the program have often experienced problems such as unemployment, social unrest, disadvantaged living conditions, and so forth. At the same time, Syracuse has a strong industrial base and is a growing metropolitan area (with a population of about 200,000). The industries of the Syracuse area are extremely diversified, and 98 of the 500 largest corporations in the United States have operations there. These factors suggest that while the problems of Syracuse's inner city area are not to be underestimated, there is considerable potential for the employment of the types of students served by the OLCs, if those students can become attuned to the requirements of the world of work and if economic conditions and the attitudes of industry are favorable.

Goals and Objectives

To prepare their students to participate in the world of work, the OLCs specify goals and objectives for each of their young clients. The four major goals, as cited by the individual serving as both Project Coordinator and interdisciplinary teacher are:

1. Each student will have at least one specific skill that he can apply in the world of work or further education.

2. Each student will achieve a specified level of competency in the basic skills of reading, communication, and computation.

3. Next, each student will have a basic background of knowledge about the world in which he lives, and how he fits into that world.

4. Finally, each student will have developed a mature decision-making process.

To achieve these goals, the OLC employs a two-phase curriculum. The first phase concentrates on developing basic proficiencies in general reading skills, vocabulary, English grammar, and arithmetic. Phase 2

continues to upgrade these skills, but adds course materials in social studies, English, health, and science. It also gives the student an in-depth understanding of the world of work, including the principles of work, the problems of the working adult, the structure and nature of labor unions, government, economics, consumer education, and national and international cultural institutions.

All students are involved throughout the program in career planning and preparation which includes vocational-technical training, on-the-job training, intensive work experience in a specialized skill area and/or preparation for higher education. More specifically, minimum graduation requirements as set forth in Bulletin 100 of the Syracuse City School District include the following:

1. Ninth-grade reading level (as defined by a standardized test).
2. Ability to communicate effectively (as measured by performance proficiency test).
3. Mastery of these areas of mathematics (as defined by performance proficiency).

    a. add whole numbers
    b. add fractions
    c. add mixed numbers
    d. add decimals
    e. subtract whole numbers
    f. subtract fractions
    g. subtract mixed numbers
    h. subtract decimals
    i. multiply whole numbers
    j. multiply fractions
    k. multiply mixed numbers
    l. multiply decimals
    m. divide whole numbers
    n. divide fractions
    o. divide mixed numbers
    p. divide decimals
    q. find averages
    r. intertranslate fractions, decimals and percents
    s. find a percent of a whole number
    t. find a percent of a decimal
    u. use instruments to measure common English units of:

        1. length
        2. area
        3. volume
        4. weight
        5. time

v. convert common English units of:

1. length
2. area
3. volume
4. weight
5. time

4. Satisfactory completion of study in the following areas: (as measured by performance proficiency tests).

a. Social studies skills

1. general reading and vocabulary
2. critical thinking and analysis
3. the ability to distinguish between fact, opinion and propaganda
4. general map, graph and chart reading
5. the ability to seek out and use public and private agencies and institutions
6. the ability to exercise one's civil rights and responsibilities
7. the ability to seek out information
8. personal and family consumer skills

b. Science skills

1. general reading and vocabulary
2. personal and family health skills
3. skills in home maintenance
4. general graph, chart and diagram reading

5. Career awareness as measured by performance proficiency

6. Must qualify in one or more of the following areas:

a. Vocational Technical School Training

1. Certification by teacher of the completion of the vocational course
   a) Receiving a passing grade
   b) Completion of the sequence
2. Satisfactory attendance pattern
   a) Regular attendance in school at least 90% of the time
   b) Promptness pattern at least 90% of the time
   c) Informing teacher of necessary absences
3. Maintaining satisfactory working relationships with employer/trainer and fellow workers (ability to work out problems).
4. If student completes training before graduation, he would either seek job in this field or enter another training program.

b. Training - On the Job or in Training Center

1. Certification of at least entry level skill by employer or trainer
2. Satisfactory attendance pattern
   a) Regular attendance at training or job at least 90% of the time
   b) Promptness pattern at least 90% of the time
   c) Informing employer/trainer of necessary absences, preferably in advance
3. Maintaining satisfactory working relationships with employer/trainer and fellow workers (ability to work out problems).
4. If student completes training before graduation, he would either seek job in this field or enter another training program.

c. Competitive Employment

If a student enters the program with a specific vocational skill and wants to utilize that skill on a job, he would be placed directly in the competitive labor market.

1. Certification of skill by employer or trainer
2. Demonstration of skill on a job for a period of six (6) months or more
3. Satisfactory attendance pattern
   a) Regular work attendance at least 90% of the time
   b) Promptness pattern at least 90% of the time
   c) Informing employer of necessary absences
4. Ability to maintain satisfactory working relationships with employer and fellow employees (ability to work out problems).

d. Post Secondary Education

1. Accepted in an institution on post secondary level
2. Adequate academic skills to predict success in career areas of study.

Student objectives geared to these requirements are currently under development and are being linked with specific curriculum materials believed to be likely to help the student achieve each objective.

Project Staff

A key element in the achievement of the OLC's goals is the staff. Several district administrators, staff members, and students mentioned that both the strength or the weakness of the program resides in its people and that the program rests on the dedication and will of the staff

to do more than average to find out what approach and materials will work with each youth. The Supervisor of the program points out that the teachers and counselors work as a team and that the intense amount of cooperation required if each student's needs are to be met does not allow any of the staff to let down without hurting the student and overburdening the rest of the staff. Thus, in the OLC program, the staff accountability process operates constantly.

For this reason, the hiring process for OLC staff focuses as much on the personal qualities of the applicant and indication of his ability and commitment to work with disadvantaged youth as it does on his or her formal credentials. Selection procedures are not strictly based on competency, but they do require the candidate to possess more than standard certification.

The ability of the teacher to relate to his students is even more important in a highly individualized setting such as the OLC than it is in the traditional classroom. The OLC teacher's role typically would include:

- Administration of diagnostic tests to each student
- Design of an individual learning program for each student, based on the results of his tests and his personal learning characteristics
- Selection and adaptation of learning materials and activities that match the needs of each learner
- Daily asignment of learning tasks to each student and correction and review of these assignments
- Individual consultation with students regarding their lessons
- Consultation with the student's parents regarding the student's progress
- Meeting with other teachers and counselors regarding each student's progress and problems.

However, as the Supervisor of the program points out, that is not all. "Sometimes," he notes, "the real test of the staff member isn't at the OLC, but rather in the middle of the night when he gets a call from one of the kids who's in some kind of a jam. It's how he responds then that will have a lot to do with how effective he can be with these kids."

The same points are true for the counselors at the OLCs (the staff at each center usually consists of two teachers and a counselor). The counselor's role at the OLC is broader than in most settings. The Vocational Counselor Job Description developed by the program outlines the counselor's functions this way:

The general functions of OLC counselors are:

1. To guide students through the necessary career development stages.
2. To assist students in growing psychologically and socially.
3. To prepare students for their career choice in the world of work.
4. To involve students in occupational training either in school and/or on the job.
5. To help students grow into healthy, responsible young adults.

Specifically, the OLC counselor is responsible for:

1. The initial interview when students enter the Center and the accurate recording of that in-depth interview.
2. Finding the appropriate means or tools for discovering the student's interests, talents, aptitudes and long-term goals.
3. Exposing each student to as many job families as may be necessary for him to make a satisfying and realistic initial career choice.
4. Making certain that each student understands all the material in the World of Work curriculum and maintains a record of the satisfactory completion of these units.
5. Individual and group vocational counseling.
6. Serving as an understanding "sounding-board" for students when their problems are particularly troublesome.
7. Taking each student through the necessary career ladder process.
8. Providing the best training opportunity for each student according to his needs.
9. Close follow-up with each student when he is in training to provide the kind of support necessary to sustain the student in his training situation.

10. Accurate periodic reporting on progress made during the year, i.e., specific skills learned, behavior in the program, attitude, ability to take instructions, etc.

11. Helping each student prepare a complete employment portfolio.

12. Maintaining records showing each follow-up visit as well as a detailed report from the employer twice a year.

13. A close follow-up with each student when he is on the job to help him adjust to his employer environment and resolve on-the-job problems.

14. Final placement before graduation or written plans for continuing education.

15. Job development in business and industry for part- and full-time job opportunities.

16. Discovering and using all possible community resources that can contribute to an individual student's development.

17. Serving as a resource person for each student in the area of career education.

One of the OLC counselors is fully credentialed as a vocational counselor, two are school social workers, and two are certified teachers.

Facilities, Materials, and Support

The most direct administrative guidance for the program comes from the Supervisor of Special Needs and Work-Study Programs for the Syracuse City Schools. Administrative support is provided by the Director of Occupational and Continuing Education, the Assistant Superintendent for Secondary and Continuing Education, and others in the city school district administration.

None of the OLC facilities is likely to win any architectural awards. The downtown Center in particular, while clean, is worn in appearance. Each center has several rooms, with space set aside for individual work, consulting with teachers or counselors, and a small instructional resources area.

A battery of examinations are used to assess students' capabilities in reading, mathematics, language arts, social studies, science, and the world of work. The results of these examinations highlight the specific areas of difficiency each student will remedy through the program.

High school academic curriculum of the program largely draws on already existing material, adapted to the needs of the individual learner, although some educational series have been written by program staff in curriculum areas where materials are not available or are not suited to the reading level and interests of target students. The inventory of educational materials is fairly large for the number of students served. The Coordinator and others on the staff are now assembling a guide keying instructional materials to objectives that will be derived based on the results of the examinations that students take and an assessment of their individual needs conducted by the OLC counselor.

In the realm of career education and preparation, the OLC staff has written a world of work curriculum especially for its students. It contains sixteen chapters (each covering an area that will touch each student's life when he becomes part of the world of work) and includes coverage of social security, consumer education, and labor unions.

The following pages contain a draft of the OLC Occupational Curriculum for the area of "career awareness" to indicate the activities and materials that are included in this aspect of the OLC program. Similar occupational curricula for the areas of "Occupational Readiness," "Specific Skills and/or Further Education," and "Realistic Career Plan" have been developed.

OCCUPATIONAL LEARNING CENTER

Occupational Curriculum

AREA Career Awareness

Goal: Give each student enough information, training, experience and involvement to enable him to make some realistic career decisions.

Skills:

I. Self-awareness (Who am I? What do I Want? How do I get there?)

Tasks - are flexible and tailored to meet individual needs. The following activities are examples.

1) Individual and group counseling

2) Appropriate personality and interest inventories

3) Read chapters II and IV in World of Work Curriculum.

II. abilities, aptitudes and talents
IV. human development

4) Recognition of the impact of work experience on one's life and the need for a satisfying career choice: chapter-work in World of Work Curriculum.

II. Occupational Information

Tasks - are flexible and tailored to meet individual needs. The following activities are examples.

1) Read chapters VIII, IX, X and XI and I in World of Work Curriculum.

VIII. Job families
IX. Occupational information
X. You, your supervisors and co-workers
XI. Resources in the community for job training
I. Career education - what is it?

2) Study appropriate materials in the job family of your choice

3) Field trips to see first-hand in different occupations

4) Movies and speakers relevant to specific jobs

5) Group discussions among the students about their personal job experiences.

III. Realistic Decision-Making

Tasks

1) Individual and group discussions about the pros and cons of various jobs

2) When a student wants to terminate a job, counseling as to the alternative ways of handling that specific situation - i.e. asking the employer for adjustments to enable him to remain on the job

3) Decision-making about the pros and cons of earning money now versus training or further education now

4) Personal assessment about the student's abilities and aspirations

Also, some of the "learning materials" of the OLC program consist of the equipment that students learn to use on the job or in job training in which they are placed by the OLC. These materials include office equipment, various kinds of tools, and construction equipment.

To be able to provide job and job training positions in the community, the OLC program has had to establish and maintain contacts with a range of community representatives. Beginning only with General Electric as a cooperating employer, the program now is able to place students with such companies as:

General Electric
Carrier Corporation
Upstate Medical Center (State University of New York)
New York Manpower Services
Jewish Home of Central New York
Onondaga County Youth Probationary Department
PICO (machine shop)
Johnson Upholstery
Human Rights Commission of Syracuse and Onondaga County
Chappell's Department Store
Home Aides
Onondaga Neighborhood Legal Services
New York Telephone Company

The program has also enlisted the backing of such groups as the Chamber of Commerce, Manufacturer's Association, the National Alliance of Businessmen, and others.

At the same time, the Supervisor points out that favorable economic conditions and understanding and commitment of local industry must be

combined if the vocational placement component of the OLC program is to expand. "We've had some companies who would like to cooperate but can't because they are having to lay off their own staff," he states. "At the same time, we've had companies which professed commitment to the program, but who weren't prepared to really work with our kids and give them the extra support and orientation they may need, particularly when they first start on a job."

Student Activities

Students who are experiencing extreme difficulty in the regular high school program are given the opportunity to participate in the OLC program by their school principal or the central office staff. Although the student has the option of declining to participate, no student who is referred to the program and who chooses to join it is excluded.

The principal who refers the student to the program provides information on his: achievement test scores for the last two years; interest test results; attendance record; behavior record; special interests and abilities; current teachers, class, grades, and alternative programs that have been offered to him; and family background. The young person's parents are also contacted when the student enters the program, to provide further information on the student and to open a channel of communication that the staff will continue to use as long as the student is in the program. An in-depth interview with the OLC counselor elicits information on the student's attitudes, aspirations, and personal problems. As necessary, other procedures and instruments (such as Holland's Self-Directed Search) are employed to assess the career guidance, counseling, and placement needs of students. From the beginning, teachers and counselors discuss as a group the needs of each student so that they may act in concert to attempt to meet those needs.

The entry level capabililities of students are assessed through a battery of academic examinations in reading, math, language arts, social studies, science, and the world of work.

An individual program is then prepared for each student, outlining for him the specific objectives that he must master before he qualifies for graduation. After reviewing these requirements, the student signs an agreement. In this agreement, the student commits himself to a program of a minimum of seven and one half hours a week of general education study

at the Center, and at least 15 hours a week of participation at work station or technical training program. He is told that the OLC staff will be available to assist him at the Center at an appointed time each day and that the counselor will help him in obtaining a job or entering a training program. The rules for participation in the OLC program and the penalties for violating them are detailed in the agreement. An interdisciplinary teacher describes how the program proceeds:

> The enrollment into the program becomes official with the signing of the agreement. Short-term academic and vocational goals are set.
>
> Each student is provided with a prescribed curriculum that will enable him to meet the graduation requirements. This prescription involves daily accountability which encourages students to take responsibility for their own progress.

Each student consults his assignment folder daily. Recorded in it are the results of his previous day's work and the specific assignments he must complete for the current day. Assignments are planned to take two hours to complete, and each student's assignments are unique. In the course of a year, a student will use a large variety of curriculum materials. The interdisciplinary teacher or counselor directs a student to those materials that, according to the teacher's or counselor's knowledge of the student and of the materials, are most likely to assist that student in achieving his objectives.

The interdisciplinary teacher continues:

> The student works by himself and at his own rate of speed. They receive constant and immediate feedback and reinforcement from the staff. Each exercise a student covers must be complete to a proficiency level of 90% or higher, before he progresses to the next exercise in any particular series. This insures that a student will not make false progress in any academic area. Every student is encouraged to complete as many assignments as he is able to handle every day. Yet the responsibility for his progress rests on him.
>
> Periodic evaluation of the student and the program is a part of each Center's routine. A report on attendance, academic progress, personal evaluation and vocational experiences is sent to the parents. Copies are also made available to the students. Individual sessions are held each quarter between student and staff to evaluate the progress of each. Goals are reviewed and re-established. Although student-staff feedback is a continuous thing at each Center these quarterly sessions ensure each student has the opportunity to meet privately with the staff.

> Our curriculum is divided into two phases to meet the general needs of every student. Phase one covers an intensive development of the basic skills. Phase two is career content oriented providing core information and development in Language Arts, Social Studies, General Science and Math. During this phase the staff devotes a great deal of time developing each student's particular needs and interests as set by his work experience, occupational training and own personal goals. Each student pursues an in-depth study of the world of work in both practical and theoretical terms. Any student who is interested in taking courses or training in a specialized area is encouraged to do so by using the resources of the school system and the community.

Both the academic and vocational progress of students are monitored by the OLC staff. Staff members also confer weekly with the student's work supervisor, and at least once every two weeks they send a report card to the student's parents. The student receives a weekly activity feedback sheet summarizing his attendance and achievement. This, combined with the constant personal availability of the teachers and counselors, allows the student to be constantly aware of how he is doing, and able to seek help when necessary. Each student knows what he must do to meet requirements for graduation. When he fulfills these requirements, he graduates immediately regardless of the day or month.

The effect of the program is perhaps best exemplified by a brief essay on "The Requirements and Opportunities of the OLC" written by a former student of OLC.

> The requirements of the OLC (Occupational Learning Center) are not as easy to meet as many people think.
>
> Most people in the regular high school programs such as Nottingham or Central High think that people in the OLC are dumb or stupid. What they don't know is the high requirements we have to meet and the great advantages we have over them.
>
> Before you call us dumb or stupid dig on this. For a regular student to pass they can score anywhere from 75% and up on a paper and from 65% and up on a test. Well you don't get away that easily at the OLC. Anything below a 90% is failing; it's just that simple. You do that same paper over and over until you get 90% or better. Some student's work is easier than others' but it is not easy for that person. There are different levels. When you first get into the program you take a test to find what level you are working on. And that determines what level your work will begin.

> Now that brings us to skipping, a thing that every student does at some time or another. Well at Nottingham or any other high school you get 2 skips but if the teacher doesn't see you, you can skip 13 or 14 times and offer any excuse and you don't have anything to worry about. Well try that at the OLC if you want to. For every day you miss you have to do double work the next day, work from the day you missed and that day's work.
>
> Our great advantages and opportunities are that when we get out of school we won't be another addition to the increasing rolls of unemployed. To get out of the OLC you must learn a skill or trade. You must have a job or be enrolled in college or trade school. You can go through a regular high school and not know any more than you did when you started. You may know a little more English or history but what will you know about the world itself, the business world? Think about it and the next time you call someone from the OLC dumb or stupid, think about his or her opportunities and requirements and great advantages.

Special Factors

The quality and dedication of the OLC staff has already been mentioned as being a key factor in the success of the OLC program. Since the originators of the program have stayed with it, the direction of the program has remained stable. At the same time, at least one staff member feels that subsequent hiring policies have been uneven and that not all staff members are willing to dedicate the same degree of energy to its success. Also mentioned was the danger that as the program becomes more established and taken for granted, it becomes less challenging and less able to elicit the great amounts of effort that were expended in first establishing it. Several administrators cited the fear that if the core staff were to depart, much of the momentum of the program would be lost.

Also mentioned previously is the policies of the Board of Education and other administrative entities, which have allowed the OLC staff the freedom to be innovative. However, there is a fear in the administration and in some schools that, because OLC clients are mainly Blacks, the growth of this approach is too much of a challenge to racial desegregation.

Another obstacle is the stigma sometimes attached to the program. It was noted that some officials have referred to the program as a place where disruptive students can continue in school without disrupting other schools. Others interviewed confirm that principals sometimes use the

program as a dumping ground for cases that they cannot handle. The Supervisor's reaction to this attitude is that taking the most difficult cases is the legitimate function of the OLC.

The lack of sufficient funding is another complaint voiced by several staff members. As previously cited, the physical facilities could be upgraded and other materials (such as audio-visual equipment) could effectively be used. At the same time, the OLC strives to keep the cost per student of the program from being too much more than the cost per student of the regular district program.

Broad Impact

The Syracuse City School District as a whole is working to make career education a part of the regular school curriculum at all grade levels. However, the specific impact of the OLC program on career information and career planning assistance in the regular district program is as yet minor. This is largely because counselors at the schools have much of their time taken by scheduling functions and must serve a much larger and more varied load case. At the same time, the need for programs such as the OLC is much greater than can currently be filled by them. For example, of the 900 students at Central Technical High School, 466 had less than a C average and 296 had a D average or lower. About one quarter of the freshman class consists of "specially promoted" youths--those promoted as a matter of course after spending three years at a junior high school regardless of their academic achievement or lack of it.

The diversion of students who were not able to function well at regular schools to OLC appears to have improved the learning atmosphere at those regular schools. Administrators and teachers at Central Technical High referred to a noticeable decrease in violence, vandalism, and disruption at the school since the OLC started.

Finally, many of those who admire the results of the OLC in working with severely disadvantaged students conclude that the District should take its cue from those successes to institute similar techniques, but at a much lower grade level and with a preventive rather than correctional function.

Evaluation

The OLC program has undertaken a number of evaluative measures. The following is a summary of the results of the first year of OLC operation

(1970-71) as summarized by the Project Coordinator:

> Daily average attendance in the Occupational Learning Center Program was 86%, while their attendance in the regular program averaged below 30%. The average increase in reading and math was approximately two grade levels as documented by testing with the Metropolitan Achievement tests. The range in reading gain was from .7 to 6.2 grade levels while the gain in mathematics was .5 to 3.6 grade levels. From carefully written chronological records of each student's behavior and attitude throughout his enrollment, it was found that 27 made substantial progress, 11 some improvement, while only 2 showed no improvement. It should also be reported that while 22 were involved in some type of criminal court action in the two years prior to enrollment, only two were involved in this while enrolled in the program.

For the 1971-72 school year, the OLC issued the following Summary Report:

> The Occupational Learning Center worked with a total of 117 students during the year, all dropouts or potential dropouts. The following is a breakdown for the total group:
>
> 13 received their high school diploma
> 75 are continuing their enrollment in the program
> 9 transferred to other schools within the district
> 2 discontinued school due to pregnancy
> 11 dropped out of school
> 1 Armed Forces
> 6 referred to high school equivalency program
>
> The staff of the Occupational Learning Center are highly pleased and encouraged with the results obtained during its second year, based on the following:
>
> ATTENDANCE: Average class attendance in the Occupational Learning Center was 81% based on complete enrollment. Records on previous school attendance indicate that these same students' regular school attendance averaged between 35 and 40%. However the actual class attendance of the majority of these students ranged from 0 to 50%.
>
> BASIC SKILLS: The average increase of students enrolled in the Occupational Learning Center was 1.6 grade levels per year in reading and 1.5 grade levels per Metropolitan Achievement Test Service.
>
> BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDE: The staff kept a carefully written chronological record of each student's behavior and attitude throughout his enrollment in the program.

Comparing the initial information with the final evaluation, 76 students were found to have made substantial progress; 39 a smaller amount of progress and 3 no improvement.

EMPLOYABILITY:

1. Supervisor's report on job performance:

Excellent	36
Satisfactory	24
Needs Improvement	20

2. Work attendance - days attended over possible work days:

90-100%	42
80-89%	19
70-79%	9
60-69%	5
50-59%	5

3. General facts:

Number of employers involved	89
Amount of money earned	$75,948 +
Number of students with private employers	48
Number of students in funded programs	60

The staff from each center also prepared a three- to five-page individual progress report on each student. They also cite positive feedback from employers, parents, and the students themselves as further evaluation data.

A follow-up project on all students who have attended the Occupational Learning Center for any significant time is currently being conducted. Follow-up is another evaluative tool that may contribute more insight into the success and failures of the program. Information gained from this follow-up report may help OLC staff better define and understand the characteristics of the students in order to more realistically serve their needs. The follow-up project has already revealed one interesting point which demonstrates the impact of the OLC program. Some youth after they have experienced success in school work and occupational experience decide they want to continue with more education after graduation to better prepare them for their career plans.

Future of the Project

The future of the OLC program lies in the continuance of the present program and the integration of many of its concepts and some of its curriculum into the regular school programs, rather than in establishment of additional Occupational Learning Centers. The Supervisor believes the implementation of the OLC program, with minor modifications, as a part of regular school program should serve the unmet needs of approximately 25% of secondary students in grades 7-12. The Supervisor of the OLC cites this integration as being the verbal commitment of the District Superintendent. He believes that the fact that Syracuse High Schools are moving toward totally individualized instruction should facilitate this integration. The specific objectives and referenced instructional materials being prepared, and the world of work curriculum that has been developed is expected to achieve broader use by teachers and counselors at the regular schools.

Within the OLCs themselves, several staff members indicate that they foresee no major shift in directions, but hope to expand their capabilities by establishing supportive training programs for project staff, by dedicating more time to communications among staff members of the five centers, and by drawing more on the community for job development.

Conclusions

The data that the OLC program has gathered on major indices such as attendance, reading ability, and job success verifies that the program has had impressive successes with an extremely difficult target population. The previous records of OLC students indicate that the Centers have client students whose prognosis for success is extremely low; the limited longitudinal follow-up data available suggest that in many cases this prognosis was favorably altered by the students' participation in the OLC program.

In collecting information for this study, no attempt was made to verify the OLC data or to collect additional hard data. However, interviews of staff, parents, district administrators, community representatives, regular school staff, and students were conducted. Unanimously, these individuals felt that the program is largely achieving its objectives. They were asked to specify observed incidents in which the program had

Funding Sources:	60% local funds 40% Part D, Federal Exemplary Vocational Funds, and Model Cities funds
Materials, Facilities, and Support	The OLC operates five centers in the city of Syracuse. The Centers are generally austere. Examinations help provide information on students' learning needs. Extensive curriculum in academic and vocational areas is used to help students achieve objectives related to their needs.
Student Activities:	At the Center, students' activities include development of basic skills, vocational development, personal counseling, and job placement and follow-up. Learning activities are highly individualized, and frequent discussions between students and their teachers and counselor is an integral part of the program. Students also work part time on a job or receive technical training.
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Available References:	Bigsby, J., Lehmann, E., Meno, L., & Brennan, V. Occupational Learning Center Report. Syracuse, N. Y.: Syracuse City School District, 1971. Brennan, V. F. Comprehensive Program Description and Evaluation Procedures for the Occupational Learning Centers: Secondary Bulletin No. 100. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse City School District, 1972.